

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part fifty-three
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CASTING OFF THE WORKS OF DARKNESS AND PUTTING ON CHRIST

Romans 13:11-14 - “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. [12] The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Think about your everyday life. There are not many things you will do well if you have absolutely no idea what time it is - when to arrive at work - when to go home - when to meet the people you must meet - when you need to pay your mortgage or deposit some funds - or when you will get paid, for that matter. Almost everything about our lives is **time sensitive**.

Because our lives are made up of minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years, we spend life lining up our **knowledge** of what needs to be done with the corresponding **time** at which it needs to be done. Because we don't live forever, fruitfulness depends on knowing what has to be **done** at what **time**. The writer of Ecclesiastes was right. There is a **time** and a **season** for everything under the sun.

Like few other texts in the Bible, this is a **time** text. This age of night and darkness is “**far gone**.” Paul doesn't mean “**far gone**” in the sense of becoming less evil or losing impact. This is still a very dark and wicked age. But it is “**far gone**” in the sense of coming to the end of its **time**.

Also, the “**day is at hand**.” The sun started to glow in the sky with Christ's life, death and resurrection. The full mid-day sun will come with Christ's second coming. In that completed sense, our **salvation** has never been nearer than it is right now (11). Once the dawn is starting to glow in the eastern sky there is nothing on earth that will stop the day from arriving. The dawn means the day is **near**. You don't usually have dawn in the middle of the night. Dawn means the night is almost over.

Paul says Christians “**know**” the time (11). They **know** the time, not the way you hear the time on some radio station as you're driving your car - as a point of passing information - but in the sense of setting the alarm on your clock for an early morning flight, or setting the reminder on your computer for a job interview, or keeping your hair appointment at 9 a.m because your wedding is at 4. Paul means Christians know the time in the sense of having life **governed** by what they **know** about the present time.

Today our study examines what Christians **do** when they **know** the time. What **changes** do they make when they know the night is “**far gone**” and the “**day is at hand**?” How shall we **respond** to the fading darkness and the dawning day?

The first phrase of our text sets the time - “**The night is far gone; the day is at hand**.” This is the reminder to set the alarm clock or the day-timer. The time is important and the response is urgent. The rest of the passage tells us what we must **do**.

1) **WE MUST PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, WHICH IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING WE MUST PUT ON CHRIST**

Both verses 12 and 14 state the same exhortation in different words. You can see the similar form when you put them together - “**....So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light....[14].... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**”

So both verses give something we must **not** do and something we **must** do. Both contain a **negative** and a **positive**. And Paul repeats almost the same form because the form is important to his instruction. You can't just **not** do bad things. That is just **morality**, not **Christianity**. And being good will take no one to heaven. But more than that, the **putting on Christ** or the **armor of light** isn't just something you do **in addition** to putting off the works of darkness. It is what **enables** you to put off the works of darkness. It's **how** we put off the works of darkness.

I know it's a bit involved, but this is so important to see. The way you “**cast off the works of darkness**” is **by** “**putting on the armor of light**”(12). And the way you “**make no provision for the flesh** is **by** “**putting on the Lord Jesus Christ**”(14).

So the first thing we need to nail down is what is Paul telling us to **do** when he tells us to put on the armor of light or to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be clear about this. There is no help in putting on a vague Christ or

paper armor. What are we talking about here and how exactly do we do it so it makes a **difference** in our lives?

The most helpful passage to help shed light on this is **1 Thessalonians 5:5-9** - “**For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. [6] So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ....**”

Even a casual reading reveals the very same ideas being presented as in our Romans 13 text. So many things are exactly the same. But one thing is different and helpful because it is **expanded** and **explained**. The important verse is **verse 8** - “**But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.**” And immediately we think of Paul’s words from Romans 13 about **armor**.

Put this together like an investigator tracking clues at a crime scene. There is much to be learned for the careful and thoughtful. From **Romans 13** we learn when Christians know the time they put on the armor of light, which is the same as putting on Christ.

Then, in **1 Thessalonians 5** we learn that putting on the armor of light is putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope. So, **putting it all together, Paul says putting on Christ is putting on faith in Christ, and love for Christ, and hope in Christ. And he also tells us these pieces of the armor of light cover the chest and the head - a breastplate and a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:8).**

Paul chooses this metaphor carefully. This dark world is constantly aiming its destructive darts at your heart and your head - at your **heart**, with its emotions and desires, and your **mind**, with its perception and remembrance of truth. That is the method of this media saturated age.

But we all know you can’t turn off thoughts like a light-switch. Sometimes the more you try **not** to think of something the more life you give to that unwanted thought. So Paul says you counter these things with more than will-power. You must resist these thoughts and affections, true enough, but there is something **more** offered for our help. We are to “**put on the Lord Jesus Christ**”(Romans 13:14). And Paul tells us this must be more than a slogan. We are to “**put on Christ**” with all the care and attention we give to putting on our **clothes**. That’s why Paul chooses this image. There you go to Tommy Bahama or Banana Republic, or whatever your choice is. We all willingly part with more money than we all know any of those clothes is worth. Why are we such suckers? Because we care greatly about what we’re putting on. We care to the point of idolatry.

This is the image Paul chooses when he tells us to “**put on the Lord Jesus Christ**.” Putting on Christ is the only way to “**cast off the works of darkness**”(12). It is the only way to “**make no provision for the flesh**”(14). So how shall we “**put on the Lord Jesus Christ?**”

Look one more time at **1 Thessalonians 5:8** - “**But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.**”

- a) **Putting on Christ means putting on faith in Christ.** So I know “**putting on Christ**” means filling my mind with His Word. Faith comes by “**hearing**” and hearing comes by the Word of God. Faith follows what you **give your attention to**. If you spend more time listening to the TSX and reading the Financial Post than the New Testament you will have more faith in your wealth than the living Christ. And that’s a great disaster because this dark world, says Paul, is “**far gone**” - meaning, **almost over**.
- b) **Putting on Christ means putting on love for Christ.** And we start to see how love for Christ is formed. It doesn’t just **happen**. Love for Christ is “**put on**” in the sense that it is the hard won fruit of **pondering** what you have **heard** about Christ. It is getting still each day and allowing precious truth to **thicken** like a rich stew on a slow simmer.

Great saints have learned something important here. You can lose all the benefit of everything you hear, **not** because you weren’t truly listening. You **were** listening. But you can still lose all the benefit of what the Holy Spirit wants to **do** with that truth simply by turning immediately to something trivial **after** you’ve listened to the truth about Christ.

You can’t **deeply ponder** Christ at the mall. You can’t **deeply ponder** Christ by soaking your life in sports. You can’t teach your children to **deeply ponder** Christ by buying them all the things they want. Listen

carefully to the words we read every time we dedicate a child in this church. These words aren't chosen lightly:

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 - "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

These are the words addressed to the **adults**. This is how the **adults** keep **their** lives focused on God so they can help their **children** focus **their** lives on God. These words aren't about the church service. They're about what a family **does** with what it **gets** at the church service.

These words describe how families **discuss** the application of God's ways to what happens to come on the TV, or the last movie they went to, or the kind of content they're streaming, or the magazines they're bringing home. And Paul says this is a big part of learning to **put on the breastplate of love for Christ**.

Learn to have eyes that see how lovely and great and relevant and wonderful beyond telling He truly is! Compare and speak with wonder about how empty and trite everything else is when measured by the glory of Christ. Make these comparisons and connections happen in **your** brain so they can happen in your **children's** brains.

And you can begin now to see why Paul starts with putting on Christ in such a specific, challenging way. This is the key to everything else. **No one will freely and joyfully "cast off the works of darkness" until he or she sees how lovely Christ is by comparison.**

- c) **Finally, Paul says putting on Christ means putting on hope in Christ's promise and future.** We are to put on the helmet of the **"hope of salvation"**(1 Thessalonians 5:8). This is the greatest protection for keeping the works of darkness out of your mind.

Fix your mind daily (hourly?) on the hope of Christ's return. Kill the lies of Satan by turning from the pull of immediate gratification or accumulation by facing your life away from the fading night and toward the eternal day. **Know** the promises of Christ. Treasure your certain future to the extent that you begin to **inhabit** it right now.

So let's all begin again right here and now. **"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and (and then) make no provision for the flesh"**(14). If you don't love and treasure Christ you will find every command an **imposition**, every sacrifice a **burden**, and every call to holiness **legalistic**.

The key is putting on **faith** in Christ through knowing His words, putting on **love** for Christ through **pondering the greatness of what you know of Him**, and putting on **hope** in Christ by capturing every vain thought that would steal your mind from anchoring itself on Christ's promised, eternal future for His disciples.

This is a great picture Paul has been painting. Put Christ on each day. That means keep Him as close as the clothes next to your body. Keep the **eye** of your being trained on Christ always. Don't drift in and out of attentiveness to Christ. Nothing is more important than faith, hope, and love in **clear apprehension of Christ - Matthew 6:22** - **"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light..."** This is not a verse about **professing** Christ. It is a verse about **prizing** Christ **in** everything else and **above** everything else. This is life **in focus**.

2) **MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, TO GRATIFY ITS DESIRES**

This is Paul's command in **verse 14b** - **"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."** It's not enough just to forsake **sins** of the flesh. We're to choke out the **desire** for the sins of the flesh. We're not to unwittingly **provide** life for these desires in our minds.

Paul calls these sins **"works of darkness"** in **verse 13** - **"Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy."**

He puts them in **pairs** and he puts them in **plurals**. He calls them works of **darkness** because they are the things we usually **deny** and try to **cover up**. They're the kinds of things people do **in the dark of denial and secrecy**. Even if we reluctantly **admit** them we usually **justify** our actions to others, sometimes to God, and almost **always** to ourselves. For all these reasons Paul doesn't call them works of **light**, but works of **darkness**.

While not intended as an exhaustive list, these three pairs cover a wide swath. **“Orgies and drunkenness”** indicates what we would be inclined in our day to describe as the actions stemming from all forms of **“substance abuse.”** Because Satan’s chief weapon is deception in the mind, anything that clouds or **potentially** clouds alert, Biblical thinking plays into his hands.

The gradual laxness toward alcohol that so marks the present church doesn’t bode well for lives that sharply treasure and display Christ’s wisdom and beauty in this world. In **every list** Paul and Jesus give of the kinds of sins that will muddy the church in the last days before Jesus returns **drunkenness** is emphasized.

“Sexual immorality and sensuality” includes sexual expression lacking the restraint and beauty of Christ’s rule. It includes pornography, homosexuality, sexual expression **outside** of marriage and **before** marriage. Christians now live with the technology in our homes on which 35% of search engine hits land on pornographic sites. This is exactly what Paul means by the **“works of darkness”** that Christians will have to **“cast off”** and **“make no provision for.”**

“Quarreling and jealousy” are the sins that break up the community of Christ in the last days. Any thought that keeps replaying a wrong received, any unwillingness to accept and love with a love that genuinely labors and prays for the best for the one who wronged me, or any position or ministry exercised by someone I hate that causes me to wince - **all** these are the works of darkness that people must cast off when they know what time it is.

But it’s not enough not to **do** these sins. Paul probes deeper than that - **“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”**(14). This is what putting on Christ entails and I must not make it less than this. Don’t let any thought even enter your head that **leads** you to think about these things. As we would say, **“Don’t go there.”**

This must be made specific. If you’re bored or angry or just discouraged don’t even **begin to think** about finding relief in alcohol. If you’re feeling your husband doesn’t listen to you or understand you, don’t even **begin to think** about that client or person at work or at church who just seems to listen and understand you so well. If you’ve been lied to or cheated out of something rightfully yours, don’t even **begin to think** of how unjust it has all been and how others need to know the real truth.

And don’t even begin to think of how you can divide the whole church up into those who sympathize with you and those who don’t. If someone must hate whom you hate to be your friend you’re a terrible friend. What could be more unloving than to seek to destroy the souls of others by punishing them for not hating your enemy? **Don’t even begin to let yourself sink into those thoughts.**

Hear the Holy Spirit speak through this profoundly moving text one more time as we close: **“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. [12] The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires”** (Romans 13:11-14). Amen.